The Disconnected Letters in the Holy Qur'ān

Thursday, January 31 2008 by saba7saba7

Welcome!

This blog aims to unravel the mystery surrounding the so-called **Disconnected Letters**, or **الحروف المقطعة** as they're often referred to in Arabic, which appear in Islam's holy book, the Qur'an.

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Synopsis

Tuesday, January 29 2008 by saba7saba7

This expository paper treats the subject of the mysterious 'Disconnected Letters' (الحروف المقطّعة) in Islam's most sacred text, the Qur'ān. The subject is approached in the following manner: first, an explanation and overview of the letters and their importance are delineated. Secondly, an overview of the main theories surrounding their significance and import are presented from historical and contemporary points of reference, and employing both Muslim and Orientalist scholarly research. Finally, I expand on my own theory as to their importance and meaning, before making a few recommendations and proposals for future research in this area.

The central aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of the different theories, both traditional and contemporary; surrounding what is a fascinating and engaging topic in Qur'ānic and Islamic Studies. It is hoped that interested parties conducting research in the areas of Arabic linguistics and comparative hermeneutics will find the information useful as a springboard for further research. It is also hoped that pedagogues, students and researchers in the area of inter-religious dialogue will find this document useful as an aid to bridging the gap between what they

in the area of inter-religious dialogue will find this document useful as an aid to bridging the gap between what they know and what they ought to know about Muslim textualism.

This paper should be considered a general exposition of the subject matter and a guide as to the extent of research into the significance of these letters. However, it is by no means exhaustive, and it does not claim to provide an in-depth treatment of the letters themselves from an orthographical, philological, semantic or semiotic point of reference. Interested parties wishing to conduct further research into the topic with regard to one of these or other specialist academic disciplines should refer to the comprehensive bibliography and the suggestions for further research.

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A Note on Dates

Monday, January 28 2008 by saba7saba7

In accordance with standard academic practice, all dates are given in both the Hegira and Gregorian calendars, with the Hegira preceding the Gregorian date.

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A Note on Transliteration

Sunday, January 27 2008 by saba7saba7

This paper is written using the Roman alphabet, but readers will also find Arabic equivalents of terms and proper nouns where it has been deemed necessary for accuracy and for reference purposes. Where transliteration of the Arabic script is used, I have employed the most commonly used system amongst scholars of the Arabic language and orientalists; with the exception of accepted, long-established Anglicised versions of Arabic nouns such as Mecca and Medina (N.B. The spelling *Qur'ān* rather than *Korān* is employed, as the former is a more accurate transcription and is now the most commonly accepted transliteration of the Arabic word by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike), all other Arabic words have been transliterated according to the following system:

b	=	ب	z	=	ز	f	=	ف
t	=	ت	s	=	س	q	=	ق
th	=	ث	sh	=	ش	k	=	ك
j	=	ج	ṣ	=	ص	l	=	ل
ḥ	=	ح	ḍ	=	ض	m	=	م
kh	=	خ	ṭ	=	ط	n	=	ن
d	=	د	ẓ	=	ظ	h	=	ه
dh	=	ذ	ʿ	=	ع	w	=	و
r	=	ر	gh	=	غ	y	=	ي

For the *hamza* (ء), like the *ʿayn* (ع), I use the apostrophe (ʿ). However, the apostrophe will always follow the short vowel to which it refers when transliterating *hamza*, whereas it precedes the short vowel to which it refers when transliterating *ʿayn*:

e.g. ʿAmr = عمر
a'mr = أمر

For the long vowels, I have employed the following symbols:
ā = ا ū = و ī = ي

N.B. For *alif maddah* (آ) which in reality constitutes a longer vowel sound than the standard *alif*, I have used the same symbol as for the alif, with an apostrophe (e.g. Qur'ān = قرآن).

For the short vowels, I use:

a = ـَـ　　u = ـُـ　　i = ـِـ

For diphthongs:

ay = ـَيْ　　aw = ـَوْ

When *ta' marbūṭah* (ة – تاء مربوطة) occurs, it is normally represented with an 'h'. However, where it suffixes the first word in a genitive construct (إضافة), the *ta' marbūṭah* is written as a 't'.

None of the names or terms employed are declined (i.e. the words are written without reflecting their declension endings – *i'arāb*).

Finally, the Arabic definite article is always joined to the word it qualifies by a hyphen. Where the *Lām* in the definite article precedes certain letters referred to by Arab grammarians as *Sun Letters* (الحروف الشّمسيّة); the assimilation of the article is reflected in the prefix by duplicating the Sun Letter.

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Introduction

Saturday, January 26 2008 by saba7saba7

The study of texts both religious and secular with a view to understanding their full meaning, has engaged linguists from the earliest known civilisations to the present day[1][2].

Tanakh scholars developed a numerological code for the letters of the Hebrew alphabet as a means to uncover what they posited to be divinely inspired enigmas hidden within the pages of their holy texts[3]. Modern day academicians and even authors of fiction[4] have also found the concept of an esoteric meaning other than the literal one intriguing.

Within the discipline of Islamology, an entire branch of study has been devoted to the exegesis of the primary Islamic text, the Qur'ān: *Tafsīr*, or literal exegesis and commentary, is perhaps the oldest and most elaborate of the Islamic sciences[5]. It was developed, and continues to evolve, in the context of Muslim requirements for a comprehensive companion to their Holy Book; a guide that elucidates and provides background commentary on the text and its revelation.[6][7].

Nonetheless, Allāh states clearly in the text that the Qur'ān is, '*A Book whereof the Verses are explained in detail – a Qur'ān in Arabic for people who know.*' (Sūrat al-Fuṣṣilat – 41:3)[8]. The Qur'ān is referred to as a '*clear proof*' (6:157)[9], '*a manifest light*' (4:174; 42:52)[10] and it has been '*fully explained to mankind*' (17:89; 18:54; 39:27)[11]; readers are also encouraged to '*think deeply*' (47:24)[12] about the text. In this particular verse, the Arabic verb 'تدبر' is used: it means 'to consider, reflect or meditate upon'[13]. In other words, although Allāh has stated categorically that the Qur'ān is a comprehensively revealed, unambiguous text, readers are encouraged to reflect on it. Hence, the divinely inspired legitimacy of making a commentary on the text itself.

This brings us to the subject of *al-Ḥurūf al-Muqaṭṭa'ah* (الحروف المقطّعة) or 'the disconnected letters' in the Holy Qur'ān: they provide perhaps one of the most enduring, intriguing and tantalising mysteries surrounding the revelation itself. As the exegetes have tried to expound on the Holy Verses and give them a context to aid a fuller understanding of the afflatus as a whole, they have encountered various mysterious letters that prefix twenty-nine of the text's 114 chapters (see Appendix One).

These *Muqaṭṭa'āt* (مقطّعات), as they shall be referred to from hereon, which are also known as *Fawātiḥ as-Sūr/A'wā'il as-Sūr*[14][15] (meaning the 'openings of the chapters'), consist of fourteen different letters that occur singly or in combinations of two, three, four or five letters to form fourteen different arrangements. Four separate combinations (الم, الر, طسم, حم) occur more than once and, with the exception of طسم, prefix several consecutive chapters to form groups.

The letters are always found at the beginning of the chapter as either a separate verse or forming the opening to the

very first verse. An exception is the combination حم/عسق, which occurs at the beginning of chapter forty-two: this combination is actually two separate arrangements with the first two letters حم composing verse one, and the second group, عسق, verse two.

Although it has been noted that the letters follow a strict order in terms of their co-occurrence[16], the suggestion that this is somehow related to the abjad or numerological order of the Arabic letters is without foundation. The *Abjadī* or Levantine order, which is still used today for listing purposes in Arabic documents, was the original order for the Arabic letters at the time of the Qur'anic revelation[17]. The Arabs employed this particular arrangement and not the modern one as it mirrored the organisation of the Nabatean abjad, the precursor to Arabic abjad.

In 310/922, Ibn Muqallah (272/885 - 328/940) invented the *Naskh* script, which displaced all other scripts from the scene; his serial ordering of the abjad, the *Hajāʾī* order, replaced the previous one. His arrangement, also known as the 'Abtath', placed letters with similar graphemes together. The name derives from أ, ب, ت, ث, the first four letters of the new serial order[18]. However, the exploitation of the abjad for numerical purposes and the elaboration of chronograms based on the verses of the Qur'ān, did not occur until the Buwayhid period[19]. Therefore, not only does the co-occurrence of the Muqaṭṭa'āt violate the Abjadī sequence, but the Arabs did not recognise any numerological significance in their serialisation.

Another proposal, which has gained credence, is that the fourteen letters that compose the Muqaṭṭa'āt, represent a definitive list of the Arabic graphemes at the time of the Qur'ānic revelation[20][21]. This theory presupposes that the diacritical marks employed to distinguish letters like ج, ح , خ were not in common usage at the time of revelation, and draws on the evidence of Qur'ānic manuscripts dating from the first century A.H.[22], which are devoid of these same diacritical marks. This theory, however, can be at best only speculation given recent research and the evidence of the earliest known post-revelation manuscript, known as PERF 558, which features these very same diacritical marks[23]. In the absence of a complete collection of 'Uthmānic codices, or indeed any authentic commentary on Arabic orthography dating from the period of revelation, this proposition is seriously flawed.

With the exception of the letters that prefix chapters two, three and thirteen, all of the letters head chapters that were revealed in Mecca[24][25]. Moreover, in all but three cases (chapters 29, 30 and 68), the Muqaṭṭa'āt precede an explicit reference to the Qur'anic revelation (see Appendix Two).

Furthermore, with regards to the actual recitation of the Qur'ān, the art of *Tajwīd* or 'lengthening' of the letters of individual words, , recommends not only that these letters should be pronounced separately, but also that they should be considerably lengthened in recital. This is similar in principle to the art of cantillation applied to the recital of the Torah[26].

Whilst contemporary scholars have proffered a number of theories regarding the significance of the Muqaṭṭa'āt, their co-occurrence and placement, traditional Muslim scholarship has also tried to account for their meaning.

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[1] Bjørn Ramberg and Kristin Gjesdal. 'Hermeneutics'. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2005 Edition)*. Edward N. Zalta (Ed.). http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/hermeneutics/ (19 April 2008).

[2] Wikipedia contributors. 'Hermeneutics'. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia*. http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hermeneutics&oldid=205518195 (19 April 2008).

[3] Ernst Muller. 1946. *History of Jewish Mysticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press p.62.

[4] Michael Drosnin. 1997. *The Bible Code*. UK: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

[5] Mahmoud M. Ayoub. 1984. *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters (Vol. I)*. New York: State University of New York Press pp.20-27.

[6] Ibid., p.27.

[7] Andrew Rippin (Ed.). 1988. *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.13.

[8] Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Dr Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali. 1999. *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān in the English Language*. Riyadh: Darussalam. p.622.

[9] Ibid., p.203.

[10] Ibid., pp.148/639.

[11] Ibid., pp.380/390/603.

[12] Ibid., p.667.

[13] Hans Wehr. 1980. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: Arabic-English*. J. Milton Cowan (Ed.). Beirut: Librairie du Liban. pp.270-271.

[14] A. Welch. 1993. 'Al-Kur'ān' (4d 'The Mysterious Letters'). *The Encyclopaedia of Islam (Vol. V: Khe-Mai)*. C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis and C. Pellat (Eds.), F.T. Dijkema and S. Nurit (Ass.). Leiden: E.J. Brill. p.412.

[15] Keith Massey. 2005. 'Mysterious Letters'. *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (Vol. iii: J-O)*. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Ed.). Leiden: E.J. Brill. p.472.

[16] Keith Massey. 1996. 'Mystery Letters of the Qur'ān'. *Arabica* **43**. pp.498-9.

[17] Dr. Hasanuddin Ahmed. 2004. *Ulm-ul-Qur'an: An Introduction to the Science of the Qur'an (How to Study and Understand the Quran)*. New Delhi: Goodword Books. pp39-40.

[18] Ibid., p.45.

[19] Ibid., p.298.

[20] Welch, op. cit., p.414.

[21] Massey 'Mysterious Letters', op. cit., pp.472-473.

[22] Beatrice Gruendler. 2005. 'Arabic Script' pp139-140. *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (Vol. I: A-D)*. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Ed.). Leiden: E.J. Brill.

[23] Alan Jones. 1998. The Dotting Of A Script And The Dating Of An Era: The Strange Neglect Of PERF 558. *Islamic Culture* **32**/4. p.97.

[24] Ahmad Von Denffer. 2003. *Ulum Al-Quran: an Introduction to the Sciences of the Quran*. Leicester: Islamic Foundation. p.146.

[25] Badr al-Din al-Zarkashi. 1980. *Al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an (2nd ed.) Vol. I*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr. pp.193-194.

[26] Kareema Carol Czerepinski. 2004. *Tajweed Rules of the Qur'ān*. Jeddah: Dar al-Khair. pp.77-78.

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Theory One – Allāh alone knows their meaning

Friday, January 25 2008 by saba7saba7

The first theory is not really a theory, but rather the accepted position of Muslim commentators. In the absence of any clear and authentic explanation of these letters either in the Qur'ān itself, or in the collected traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad, scholars, whilst availing themselves of proposing theories about the Muqaṭṭa'āt, have always attributed ultimate knowledge of their meanings to Allāh[27][28]. They draw this conclusion based on the numerous mentions or allusions in the Qur'ānic text made to knowledge of the Unseen or *al-Ghayb* (see for example 16:77, 27:75), which Allāh states lies with Him alone.

Another very important injunction in the Holy Book, which commentators have used to justify their position, originates from the early verses in chapter three (3:4-8): here, Allāh distinguishes between the entirely clear verses of the Book (*Muḥkamāt*) and others which are left deliberately ambiguous (*Mutashābihāt*). Allāh makes it clear that none know the Qur'ān's hidden meanings save Him alone, and that anyone seeking a cryptic significance to the verses (*ta'wīl*) is a 'deviator from the truth'.

Scholars of the Qur'an have classified the Muqaṭṭa'āt as being part of these *Mutashābihāt*[29]. Hence, the reluctance amongst commentators to ascribe any particular meaning to them.

Of all the explanations given by various intellectuals, the one, which is most widely supported, is outlined in Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr[30]:

> "The human body is composed of various fundamental elements that are found in nature. Clay and dust are composed of the same fundamental elements. Yet it would be absurd to say that a human being is exactly the same as the dust. We can all have access to the elements that are found in the human body; if we add a few gallons of water, this provides us with the body's constitution. We know the elements in the human body and yet we are at a loss when asked to characterise the secret of life."

Similarly, the Qur'ān addresses those people who reject its divine authority. It tells them that the Qur'ān, is in their own language, a language in which the Arabs took great pride. It is composed of the same letters that the Arabs used to express themselves so eloquently.

Arabic was at its peak when the Qur'ān was revealed. With the Muqaṭṭa'āt, the Qur'ān challenges mankind to produce a sūrah in any way comparable to it in beauty and elegance if they doubt its authenticity.

Initially, the Qur'an challenges all of mankind to produce a work of literature like the Qur'ān and adds that they would not be able to do so even if they supported each other (17:88, 52:34). Later, the Qur'ān repeats the challenge in Sūrat Hūd (11:13) by challenging mankind to produce ten chapters like it, and in Sūrat Yūnus (10:38) to produce one sūrah like it. Finally, the least demanding challenge is given in Sūrat al-Baqarah:

> "And if ye are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a sūrah like thereunto; and call your witnesses or helpers (if there are any) besides Allah if your doubts are true. But if ye cannot – and of a surety ye cannot – then fear the fire whose fuel is men and stones – which is prepared for those who reject faith." [2:23-24]

To compare the skill of two artisans, they must be given samples of the same raw material and their performance evaluated in completing the same task. If they are tailors, they must be provided with the same fabrics. The raw materials of the Arabic language are the letters of the Muqaṭṭa'āt. The miraculous nature of the language of the Qur'ān does not lie only in the fact that it is God's word, but also in the fact that despite being composed of the same letters in which the pagan Arabs took pride, its metrics and versification are unrivalled.

The Arabs were noted for their rhetorical ability, eloquence and meaningful expression. Just as the constituents of the human body are known to us and can be obtained by us, the letters comprising the Qur'ān, such as *Alif Lām Mīm* are known to us, and used frequently to formulate words. Life cannot be created by us, even if we possess knowledge of the constituents of the human body. Similarly, we cannot capture the same eloquence and exquisiteness of expression that we find in the Qur'ān, despite knowing the letters that constitute it. The Qur'ān thus proves its divine origin.

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[27] Jalal Al Din al-Suyuti. 2000. *Al Itqan fi 'Ulum Al Qur'an Vol. II.* Beirut: Dār Al Kutub Al 'Ilmiya. pp.8-13.

[28] Abū al-Fidā' Ibn Kathīr. 1999. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm (Vol. I).* Damascus: Dār Ṭayyibah lilnashr wa Tawzī'a. pp52-54.

[29] Von Denffer, op. cit., p.142.

[30] Ibn Kathīr, op. cit., pp.52-54.

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Theory Two – Mystical signs with a symbolic meaning

Thursday, January 24 2008 by saba7saba7

The unanswered question of the significance of the Muqaṭṭa'āt, in spite of the unambiguous prohibition of mystical interpretation in the Qur'ān, has provided Sufis and Baha'is in particular with both devotional material and evidence of the mystical nature of the Holy Book[31][32].

Sufis, whose worship involves intense devotional rituals, have meditated on the meaning of the Muqaṭṭa'āt and interpreted their significance and prime position prefixing the twenty-nine chapters[33]. The meanings they assign to them differ from *Ṭarīqah* to *Ṭarīqah* (Sufi chapter or movement), but their essential import remains the same: the Muqaṭṭa'āt are attributes of the Divine. They prefix the various chapters as both a demonstration to the Prophet of their authentic origin during the revelation, and as a message to all who hear them concerning His qualities. Sufis see them as an adjunct to the well-documented ninety-nine *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* (glorious names) found throughout the Qur'ān, and a further manifestation of Allāh's virtues[34].

Numerous Sufi clerics and adherents have advanced theories as to the meaning of the disconnected letters. Many suggest that by expounding on their 'hidden' meaning, one can attain a closer relationship with God[35]. One such interpretation advanced by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani of the Naqshabandīyah[36], employing the letters in an invocation together with their posited meanings, is given below.

> "O Allah! Bestow blessings, peace and honour; and give nobility, power and greatness; and have mercy on the one who is lofty in power and towering in grandeur, and is the high-aspiring light and the clear truth:
>
> The letter "**Alif**" is for might and power,
> "**Ḥā'**" is for the realm of mercy,
> "**Mīm**" is for sovereignty,
> "**Lām**" is for hidden kindness,
> "**Rā'**" is for hidden compassion,
> "**Noon**" is for perfect benevolence,
> "**'Ayn**" is for care and concern,
> "**Kāf**" is for sufficiency,
> "**Yā'**" is for headship and becoming master,
> "**Sīn**" is for happiness,
> "**Qāf**" is for nearness,
> "**Ṭā'**" is for the sultanate,
> "**Hā'**" is for the tie or bond (of friendship)
> And "**Ṣād**" is for preservation…"

This appears to be an arbitrary allocation of attributions to the various letters rather than the establishment of concrete meanings, based on the first letter of the attribute in Arabic, for example:

> *"Wa 'ayn il-'ināyah wa kāf il-kifāyah* و عين العِناية و كاف الكِفاية"

As for the Bahā'is, they too attach a mystical significance to these letters, drawing on the teachings of the central figures in their religion, Baha'u'llah and the Bab[37].

Bahā'u'llāh wrote a commentary on the Muqaṭṭa'āt in response to a request from one of his adherents, Mirza Aqay-i-Rikab-Saz. This commentary became known as the *Lawḥa-i-Ayiy-i-Nūr* (Tablet of the Verse of Light)[38] in Persian, and has remained the subject of serious scholarship amongst Bahā'is to this day. In it, Bahā'u'llāh comments on the creation of the letters themselves; something of a departure from traditional scholarship. He then proceeds to relate their formation to the so-called 'Verse of Light' (24:35) in the Qur'ān, before offering an explanation of their meanings. His central preoccupation, and that to which he ascribes the most important role, is with the letter Alif. Bahā'u'llāh, in his *Kitāb-i-Iqān*[39], writes:

> "In the beginning of His Book He saith: "Alif. Lām. Mīm. No doubt is there about this Book: It is guidance unto the God-fearing (Qur'ān 2:1)." In the disconnected letters of the Qur'an, the mysteries of the divine Essence are enshrined, and within their shells, the pearls of His Unity are treasured. For lack of space, we do not dwell upon them at this moment. Outwardly, they signify Muhammad Himself, Whom God addressed saying: "O Muhammad, there is neither doubt nor uncertainty about this Book which hath been sent down from the heaven of divine Unity. In it is guidance unto them that fear God." Consider how He hath appointed and decreed this self-same Book, the Qur'an, as guidance unto all that are in heaven and on earth. He, the divine Being, and unknowable Essence, hath, Himself, testified that this Book is, beyond all doubt and uncertainty, the guide of all mankind until the Day of Resurrection."

For Bahā'u'llāh, the *Alif*, being a single vertical stroke, forms the basis for all the other letters and hence represents Allāh. The other Muqaṭṭa'āt are not so much qualities of the Divine Himself, but outward manifestations of his guidance and trusteeship on the temporal plane; the other Muqaṭṭa'āt sometimes represent His prophets and sometimes represent other facets of his worldly manifestations.

A constant metaphor employed by Bahā'u'llāh throughout his writing is that of the 'Primordial Pen'[40]. He uses it to encapsulate all aspects of Allāh's Creation. According to Bahā'u'llāh, it is this Pen that through God's will orchestrates all that is Creation. By means of this metaphor, Bahā'u'llāh theorises that all of Creation testifies to its conception through its own reality; that this is their purpose for being. Therefore, the Muqaṭṭa'āt are but further examples of God's omneity, placed in the Holy Qur'ān to bear witness to His Presence (See Qur'ān 51:56).

The Bāb, who was the forerunner to the Bahā'ī faith, wrote a literary composition entitled *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* (Maintainer of the Divine Names)[41]. In it, he includes a set of disconnected letters in the third verse of almost all of the 111 chapters. Some of these letters mirror the Muqaṭṭa'āt in the Qur'ān, whilst others are composed of different combinations. What is clear is that the Bāb, who claimed to have received a revelation, is trying to mimic the style of the Qur'ān; perhaps in order to engender support for his prophethood.

Evidently, amongst Sufi orders and Bahā'īs, the Muqaṭṭa'āt form part of the authentic revelation. Their utilization in invocations and in literature has enshrined their mystic function; any interpretation of their meanings has been largely arbitrary and has not sought to explain their relative positions, frequency or co-occurrence.

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[31] Abdurrahman Habil. 1987. 'Traditional Esoteric Commentaries on the Quran'. *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations.* Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Ed.). State University of New York Press: New York. pp.24-47.

[32] Baha'u'llah. 1994. *The Kitab-i-Iqan: The Book of Certitude*. Shoghi Effendi (Trans.). Wilmette: Baha'I Publishing Trust. pp.202-204.

[33] Elmer H. Douglas (Trans.) and Abu Rabi. 1993. *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili – A translation from the Arabic of Ibn al-Sabbagh's Durrat al-Asrar wa Tuhfat al-Abrar*. New York: State University of New York Press. pp.24-25.

[34] Juan R.I. Cole. 1994. 'The World as Text: Cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'I'. *Studia Islamica* **80**. pp.9-10.

[35] Ibid., p.10.

[36] Siddiq Osman Noormuhammad. 2004. *Salawaat by Sufi Mashaaikh. Chapter 1: Salawaat of Gauth u'l A'zam Muhyudeen (Shaykh 'Abdul Qadir Jilani)*. Nairobi: Iqra Islamic Publications.

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[38] Stephen N. Lambden (Trans.). 2004. *Tafsīr al-ḥurūfāt al-muqaṭṭa`āt (Commentary on the Isolated Letters) or Lawḥ-i āyah-yi nūr (Tablet about the Light Verse)*. http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/BAHA'-ALLAH/L-hurufat.htm (3 January 2008)

[39] Baha'u'llah, op.cit., pp.203-204.

[40] Bahá'u'lláh. 1988. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.* Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

[41] Todd Lawson. 1997. 'Reading Reading Itself: The Bab's Sura of the Bees. A Commentary on Qur'an 12:93 from the text of Sūrah Joseph. Translation and Commentary'. *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* **1**/5.

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Theory Three – Mnemonic devices summarizing the contents of the chapters which they prefix

Wednesday, January 23 2008 by saba7saba7

A number of scholars have tried to relate the occurrence of the Muqaṭṭa'āt to the contents or theme of the chapters which they prefix[42]. This theory takes as inspiration the presence of 'groups' of Muqaṭṭa'āt, which suggests some connection between chapters prefixed by the same letters (see Appendix Two).

For there to be any support for this hypothesis chapters that are prefixed by the same groups of letters, or by other groups containing the same letter, should be linked thematically.

Al-Sayyid aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā'ī mentions very briefly the significance of these letter symbols at the beginning of his exegesis of Sūrat Maryam (chapter 19)[43], although a comprehensive discussion of the letter symbols appears in his exegesis of Sūrat ash-Shūrā (chapter 42)[44]. He says:

> "…those chapters of the Holy Qur'ān that start with the Muqaṭṭa'āt have a correlative link to their context through these letters. In other words, those letter symbols that are common to different chapters tell us that there is a logical relation with the context of those chapters also. The proof of the above statement is the similarity that can be seen between Sūrat Maryam (chapter 19) and Sūrat Ṣād (chapter 38) in which both relate the story of the Prophets."

The same common theme can be seen linking Sūrat ash-Shuʾarā' (chapter 26), an-Naml (27), al-Qaṣaṣ (28) and Ṭā-Hā (20) through the story of Moses and his encounter with the Pharaoh. Each of these chapters is prefixed by the letter *Ṭa* among other letters.

Let us now examine more scrupulously, for instance, two such chapters prefixed by the same letters: Sūrat Maryam and Sūrat Yā-Sīn are both prefixed by the letter *Yā'*.

The general theme of Sūrat Maryam is mentioned at the end of the chapter in verse 97[45]:

> 'So We have made this (the Qur'ān) easy in your own tongue (O Muḥammad), only that you may give glad tidings to the pious and warn with it the most quarrelsome people.'

The overriding premise is one of admonishment and the conveyance of glad tidings. In the beginning of the chapter, the adventures of I'brāhīm, I'sḥaq, Y'aqūb (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), the episode of Hārūn and Mūsā (Aaron and Moses) and the story of I'smāī'l (Ishmael) and I'drīs (Enoch) are related together with their share of the blessed and ordained leadership that has been given to them. The chapter goes on to mention some examples of the mistakes of the people in the state of delusion, their oppression and their unreasonable ideas, such as denying the resurrection of the body and the future life in the Hereafter, accusing God of having a son, idol worship, etc. The punishment for this behaviour is also mentioned.

Sūrat Yā-Sīn replicates and links the theme of Sūrat Maryam in the same manner: the chapter begins by affirming the prophethood of Muḥammad, who came as a petitioner, and then recalls those who had belied the Messengers, and rejected God's message. It then goes on to recount the various signs of Allah, before describing the events surrounding the day of resurrection. At this stage, the recompense for the pious and the miscreants is explained in some detail. Powerful arguments are presented to those who doubt and deny the event of resurrection before the chapter ends with a profound reminder that with Allah is the reality of the whole creation, and everyone will eventually return to Him to account for their deeds.

The letter that links both, the letter *Yā'*, could represent *al-Yaqīn*, which signifies complete and unwavering faith, something of a common thread between the chapters.

<u>The letter symbols:</u>
Kāf-Hā'-Yā'-'Ain-Ṣād. (19:1)[46]

Yā'-Sīn. (36:1)[47]

<u>Polytheism and Allah's Decree:</u>
It beseems not Allāh that He should take to Himself a son, glory be to Him; when He has decreed a matter He only says to it "be" and it is. (19:35)[48]

And they have taken gods besides Allāh that they may be helped. (36:74)[49]

His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it 'be' and so it is. (36:82)[50]

<u>Serving Allah, the Right Path:</u>
And surely Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, therefore serve Him; this is the right path. (19:36)[51]

And that you should serve Me; this is the right way. (36:61)[52]

Serving Satan, your enemy:
O my father! Serve not Satan; surely Satan is disobedient to the Beneficent Allāh. (19:44)[53]

Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you should not serve Satan? Surely, he is your open enemy. (36:60)[54]

The Return to Allah:
Surely, We inherit the earth and all those who are on it, and to Us they shall be returned. (19:40)[55]

Therefore, glory be to Him in Whose hand is the reality of all things, and to Him you shall be brought back. (36:83)[56]

The Resurrection:
And says man: What! When I am dead shall I truly be brought forth alive? Does not man remember that We created him before, when he was nothing? (19:66-67)[57]

And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. Says he: Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten? Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognisant of all creation. (36:78-79)[58]

Destruction of previous generations:
And how many of the generations have We destroyed before them who were better in respect of goods and outward appearance! (19:74)[59]

And how many a generation have We destroyed before them! Do you see any one of them or hear a sound of them? (19:98)[60]

Do they not consider how many of the generations have We destroyed before them, because they do not turn to them? (36:31)[61]

As far as other chapters prefixed by the same letters are concerned, particularly those such as the *A L M*, *A L R* and *Ḥ M* groups, more research is needed to extrapolate the common themes, as well as to allocate definite attributes to the Muqaṭṭa'āt in order to explain their precise arrangement across multiple chapters. The theory linking the letters and their immediate contexts is appealing and plausible, and has certainly aroused the interest of numerous scholars.

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[42] Welch, op. cit., pp.412-414.

[43] Al-Sayyid al-Ṭabāṭabā'i. 1980. *Tafsīr 19:1. Tafsīr al-Mīzān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=56&tSoraNo=19&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0. (3 March 2008)

[44] Al-Sayyid al-Ṭabāṭabā'i. 1980. *Tafsīr 42:1. Tafsīr al-Mīzān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=56&tSoraNo=42&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0. (3 March 2008)

[45] Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Dr Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali, op. cit., p.409.

[46] Ibid., p.399.

[47] Ibid., p.573.

[48] Ibid., p.402.

[49] Ibid., p.580.

[50] Ibid., p.581.

[51] Ibid., p.402.

[52] Ibid., p.579.

[53] Ibid., p.403.

[54] Ibid., p.579.

[55] Ibid., p.403.

[56] Ibid., p.581.

[56] Ibid., p.581.

[57] Ibid., p.406.

[58] Ibid., p.581.

[59] Ibid., p.407.

[60] Ibid., p.409.

[61] Ibid., p.577.

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Theory Four – an example of the orthography of the early Arabic alphabet in the Qur'ān

Tuesday, January 22 2008 by saba7saba7

According to Welch[62], when viewed in the context of the earliest written versions of the Qur'ān, the Muqaṭṭa'āt could have represented a complete record of the Arabic alphabet for readers.

The Arabic alphabet consists of eighteen distinct graphemes (ا ب ج ر س ص ط ع ف ق ك ل م ن ه و ي) when each letter is viewed in isolation. These eighteen can further be reduced to fifteen separate graphemes if we count the graphemes of ب ن ي and ف ق respectively as homographs when written in the non-final position. In combination with diacritics or dots to distinguish between the various letters that are allographs, the Arabic script expresses a total of twenty-eight phonemes.

In the earliest versions of the Arabic script, and hence in the earliest written versions of the Qur'ān[63], there were no diacritics to distinguish between graphemes which represented different sounds. Furthermore, the letters ف ق و as well as د ذ ك were allographs, in contrast to their representation in the modern Arabic script. This further reduction to fourteen distinct graphemes as represented by the Arabic script of the seventh century C.E. provides a complete representation of the Arabic alphabet at that time[64].

The fourteen letters which make up the Muqaṭṭa'āt represented in the Qur'ān therefore provide a definitive version of the early Arabic script. Welch proposes that their placement at the beginning of twenty-nine of the Qur'ān's chapters, when coupled with the numerous references in the Quran (6:98, 41:2, 12:2 et al.) to it being a guide for those who understand and to its revelation in clear Arabic, is evidence that the Muqaṭṭa'āt are there to demonstrate the clarity of the language, to function as a pronunciation guide, or for use as a pedagogical tool.[65]

There are several inconsistencies in this theory, not the least of which is the fact that it does not explain the placement of the Muqaṭṭa'āt before these particular twenty-nine chapters. Neither does it explain the order of the letters and their arrangement in each particular occurrence, both of which seem to contradict the established order of the Arabic alphabet's 'abjad', which was used at that time and continued to be the established order until at least a century after the Prophet's death[66], or for that matter, the revised order which is still in use today.

Generally accepted theories of the evolution of the Arabic script[67] (for a widely held view see Hitti's *History of the Arabs*), hold that the dotting or diacritical marks were developed during al-Hajjaj bin Yūsuf's governorship of Iraq. In contrast, contemporary researchers such as Alan Jones have drawn different conclusions based on the earliest papyrus featuring the Arabic script (PERF 558)[68]. From this early epigraph, it is clear from the use of the diacritical marks within the text, that the system of diacritics for distinguishing between allographs was available to the scribes charged with producing the first manuscripts of the Qur'ān during the 'Uthmanic caliphate. The fact that these diacritics are not found in the earliest extant copies is a moot point, given that any representation of the Arabic abjad within the pages of the Qur'ān (the Muqaṭṭa'āt) would likely have used the diacritics to distinguish between the 14 graphemes and the 28 phonemes of the Arabic language. This should have been the case so as to provide a complete record of the Arabic phonemic range if Welch's theory were correct.

Furthermore, we know from anthropological and linguistic research into the pre-Islamic period, as well as from the name of the Qur'ān itself, that the Arabs pursued an oral tradition. God's word, in keeping with the tradition of its oral revelation, was initially destined for recitation and memorisation, as opposed to its eventual codification or inlibration in the written Qur'ān[69].

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[62] Welch, op. cit., p.414

[63] M A S Abdel Haleem. 1994. 'Qur'ānic Orthography: The Written Representation Of The Recited Text Of The Qur'ān'. *Islamic Quarterly* **38**/3. p.172

[64] Gruendler, op. cit., p.139.

[65] Welch, op. cit., p.414.

[66] Ahmed, op. cit., p.40.

[67] Phillip K. Hitti. 2002. *History of the Arabs (Rev. 10th ed.)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p.219.

[68] Jones, op. cit., pp.97-98.

[69] Alan Jones. 2005. 'Orality and Writing in Arabia'. *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (Vol. III: I-O)*. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Ed.). Leiden: E.J. Brill. p.590.

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Theory Five – the Numerological Significance of the Disconnected Letters

Monday, January 21 2008 by saba7saba7

One theory for God's establishment of these letters in the Qur'ān holds that the letters themselves are part of a deliberate numerical structure underlying the text, revealed as an integral part of the revelation. According to the theorists, God has woven this code into the Qur'ān not only for those with diligence and insight to discover, but as a further proof of the Qur'ān's divine origins[70].

An Egyptian scientist and computer expert named Dr. Rashad Khalifa entered the Quran into his computer in an attempt to search for any design that could account for the Muqaṭṭa'āt. The result of his extensive research was the discovery of an intricate mathematical system that pervades the whole Quran and governs every possible parameter, including these letters[71].

The theory of the number nineteen being the basis for this inherent mathematical structure to the Qur'ān derives its origin from chapter 74, verses 30 and 31 of the Qur'ān[72]:

(عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ)

(74:30) – Over it are Nineteen.

(وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَزْدَادَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيمَانًا وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا
الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَٰذَا
مَثَلًا كَذَٰلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَمَا
هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرَىٰ لِلْبَشَرِ)

(74:31) – And We have set none but angels as guardians of the Fire; and We have fixed their number only as a trial for Unbelievers, in order that the People of the Book may arrive at certainty, and the Believers may increase in Faith, and that no doubts may be left for the People of the Book and the Believers, and that those in whose hearts is a disease and the Unbelievers may say, What symbol doth Allah intend by this? Thus doth Allah leave to stray whom He pleaseth, and guide whom He pleaseth: and none can know the forces of thy Lord, except He. And this is no other than a warning to mankind.

In verse 30, God proclaims that the number of angels guarding the gates of hell is nineteen. In the subsequent verse (31), this number is established as a test to distinguish between believers and unbelievers.

Proponents of the theory of the importance of this number hold that, with simple arithmetic, by adding the number of chapters prefaced by the letters (29) to the number of letters (14), then adding the sum of these two numbers to the number of combinations in which the letters occur (14), a multiple of nineteen is obtained (29 + 14 + 14 = 57 [3 × 19])[73].

Further calculation of the number of occurrences of each letter, in each chapter prefaced by the letters, provides some startling evidence of the extent to which this number permeates the Arabic text. That said, various anomalies in the elaboration of this number have surfaced if one attempts to continue the analysis of the entire Qur'ān based on this figure.[74]

Suffice to say that the theory does not provide any answer to the placement of the letters before these particular chapters, other than their usage as an arithmetical challenge; for theorists, the role of these particular chapters is immaterial, as their contents and remit do not appear to correspond to the numerical findings.

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[70] Dr Rashad Khalifa. 1981. *The Computer Speaks: God's Message to the World*. Tucson: Renaissance Productions. p.9.

[71] Dr Rashad Khalifa. 1982. *Qur'ān: Visual Presentation of the Miracle*. Tucson: Islamic Productions.

[72] Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Dr Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali, op. cit., p.765.

[73] Dr Rashad Khalifa, '*The Computer Speaks'* op. cit., p.199.

[74] See, for example, the following website for a number of articles criticising the theory of 19 in the Qur'ān: http://answering-islam.org.uk/Religions/Numerics/ (19 March 2008). For further information regarding the numbering theory and its proponents, visit: http://www.19.org (19 March 2008).

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Theory Six – the Letters are Vocatives Alluding to the Prophet

Sunday, January 20 2008 by saba7saba7

The use of vocatives to introduce important sections of the Qur'ān is an established fact. Allāh communicates with the Prophet, 'Banī I'srā'īl' (the Children of Israel) and 'those who believe' (يأيّها الّذين أمنوا...) *inter alia*[75], through the medium of the text by way of various stylistic and grammatical devices such as vocative particles:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُواْ رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ﴾

(2:21) – O ye men! worship your Lord Who created you and those who were before you, that you might guard against evil.

﴿يا عِبادِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ أَرْضِي واسِعَةٌ فَإِيَّايَ فَاعْبُدُونِ﴾

(29:56) – O My servants who believe! verily, My earth is vast; so worship Me alone.

One proposed explanation for the Muqaṭṭa'āt, which would go some way to explaining their consistent placement at the outset of chapters, is that they are vocative formulas for attracting the attention of the Prophet or his audience. As-Suyūtī, in his I'tqān[76], mentions a number of alternative explanations for each formula, drawing the conclusion that each one refers in some way to the Prophet of Islam: for example, Ṭa-Ha is supposed to have meant 'O man' in one of the early Arabic dialects of the 'Akk, and by analogy was used to attract the attention of Muḥammad. Yā-Sīn is also related as denoting 'O man' in the dialect of the Ṭayy, and according to Ibn 'Abbās, was used as a term of esteem or affection to refer to the Prophet.

The thesis of the Muqaṭṭa'āt being vocatives is further supported by the fact that in every case, the text following them is couched in the second person singular, a rhetorical device that is not employed anywhere else in the Qur'ān:

﴿الم /اللّهُ لا إِلَـهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ /نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقاً لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَاةَ وَالإِنجِيلَ﴾

(3:1-3) – Alif, Lām, Mīm. Allah is He besides Whom there is none worthy of worship, the Living, the Self-Subsisting and All-Sustaining. He has sent down to thee the Book containing the truth and fulfilling that which precedes it; and He has sent down the Torah and the Gospel before this, as guidance to the people; and He has sent down the Criterion.[77]

﴿طسم /تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ /لَعَلَّكَ بَاخِعٌ نَّفْسَكَ أَلَّا يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

(26:1-3) – Ṭa, Sīn, Mīm. These are verses of the Book that makes things clear. Haply thou wilt grieve thyself to death because they believe not.[78]

By substituting the Muqaṭṭa'āt in each case with the Arabic يا محمّد, we notice that the meaning of the accompanying text is not altered in any way. It would not be fanciful to suggest that, whilst the Muqaṭṭa'āt themselves changed form depending on the concomitant message being relayed, the essential import of them as forms of address or vocative devices remained the same.

Special mention here must be made of Alan Jones' assertion that the letters were battle cries used by the Prophet of Islām in order to arouse the attention of the Arabs. He draws on traditions related by ar-Rāzī, amongst others, that the Muqaṭṭa'āt *Ḥa-Mīm* were employed to communicate the message of the Qur'ān more effectively by way of rousing oaths in the vernacular known intimately by the Hijāzī Arabs.[79]

Whilst this is a plausible explanation for the manifestation and incidence of the Muqaṭṭa'āt, it does not account for the various combinations or provide an answer as to their occurrence in some cases across multiple successive chapters.

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[75] Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Dr Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali: see, for example, Sūrat al-Baqarah pp.14-76.

[76] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī. 2000. *al-Itqan fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān (Vol. II)*. Dār Al Kutub Al 'Ilmiya. pp.15-21.

[77] Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Dr Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali, op. cit., pp.77-78.

[78] Ibid., p.479.

[79] Jones, Alan Jones. 1962. 'The Mystical Letters of the Qur'an'. *Studia Islamica* **16**. pp. 5-11.

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Theory Seven – the Letters Hold a Semiotic Significance

Saturday, January 19 2008 by saba7saba7

Ḥamiduddīn Farāhī (d. 1930 AD) elaborated an intriguing solution which might hold the key, at least to the significance of the Muqaṭṭa'āt[75]. We shall briefly delineate his theory here.

Any cursory investigation into the origins of the Arabic abjad would reveal that it has much in common with the Hebrew abjad, which itself has roots in the Syriac and Aramaic abjads. Farāhī is of the opinion that the letters of this parent abjad did not just represent phonetic sounds, but also symbolised the shape of certain concrete objects from which the script was ultimately elaborated. He goes on to assert that this acrophonic origin of the letters was influenced by the Phoenicians who had borrowed the concept for the elaboration of their own abjad from the early Egyptians whose hieroglyphic system was primarily based around pictograms.

The science which deciphered the meanings of these letters is now extinct. However, there are some letters whose meanings have persisted to this day, and the way they are written somewhat resembles their ancient forms. For example, it is known about the Arabic letter *Alif* that it was first used to mean a cow and represented a cow's head; the letter *Bayt* in Hebrew means 'house'; the Hebrew letter *Gimel* meant camel; *Ṭa* stood for a snake and its shape resembles that of a serpent; and *Mīm* represents a water wave and has a similar form.

Farāhi presents Sūrat al-Qalam (also known as 'Sūrat Nūn') in support of his theory. The letter Nūn still denotes a fish. In this Sūrah, the Prophet Jonah has been addressed as Ṣāḥib al-Hūt or he who has been swallowed by a whale. Farāhī opines that it is because of this reference that the Sūrah is often referred to by the letter Nūn, which appears disconnected at the beginning of the first verse. He goes on to theorise that if one considers the example given above, it is quite likely that the Muqaṭṭa'āt by which other chapters commence are placed so as to symbolise a relation between the topics of a particular sūrah and their own ancient connotations.

Some other names of the Qur'ānic chapters reinforce Farāhi's theory. Sūrat Ṭa-Ha, for example, begins with the letter *Ṭa*, which represents a serpent. After a brief introduction, the tale of Moses and his staff, which is transformed into a snake, is depicted. Chapters 26, 27 and 28, which are also prefixed by Muqaṭṭa'āt containing the letter *Ṭa*, portray this aforementioned miraculous episode.

Sūrat al-Baqarah, which begins with the letter *Alif*, is another example that further buttresses Farāhī's claims. It has been indicated before that the letter Alif was analogous with the cow and represented a cow's head. Sūrat al-Baqarah contains an anecdote about a cow and its sacrifice.

More research is needed to substantiate this theory across the other chapters prefixed by Muqaṭṭa'āt, and to elaborate the original pictographic meanings of the other letters employed. Nevertheless, given what we know about the origins of early orthography, such an explanation would not be beyond the realms of possibility.

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[75] Islahi, Amin Aḥsan. 2004. *Taddabur-i-Quran*. Karachi: Faraan Foundation. pp.82-85

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Theory Eight – the Letters are Abbreviations

Friday, January 18 2008 by saba7saba7

A wide variety of traditional Muslim scholars have concluded that the Muqaṭṭa'āt were principally abbreviations for God's qualities. Academics as diverse as as-Suyūtī[81], aṭ- Ṭabāṭabā'i[82] and aṭ-Tabarī have opined that the letters' mysteries are enshrined in their function as attributes of Allāh. For instance, Ibn Kat͟hīr relates on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'aūd that the letters ALM represent *a̲'nā Allā̲hu a''alam̲* (أَنَا اللهُ أعلمُ), 'I, God, know full well'; ALR represent *a̲'nā Allā̲hu a'rā̲* (أنا اللهُ، أَرَى), I, God, can see'; and ALMṢ represent *a̲'nā Allā̲hu a'fṣi̲l* (أنا اللهُ، أَفْصِلُ), I, God, can discern'[83].

Three modern hypotheses regard them as either abbreviations of invocations, chapter inscriptions, redactional ciphers or names of the amanuenses themselves. Massey[84] has classified these theories into two categories: abbreviationist and redactional.

One suggestion is that the letters were almost certainly abbreviations of well-known Qur'ānic expressions, e.g. that ALMṢ stood for *ṣirāt AL-MuṢtaqīm*[85]. Such proposals are completely arbitrary as there is no established rationale for abbreviating such words before random chapters; the aim of an abbreviation should be to help clarify a text, not obfuscate the meaning and render it unintelligible, as would be the case with such a random attribution of catchwords.

Another more plausible supposition assumes the Muqaṭṭa'āt, which are used as the titles of chapters (viz. YS, Ṣ, Q, ṬH, and N, which is an alternative heading for Ṣūrat al-Qalam), were employed because they represent memorable phrases or catchwords taken from the chapters they prefix[86]. Based on this premise, the other Muqaṭṭa'āt would also represent abbreviations of important lexis within the Qur'ānic codex. Some possible solutions were suggested by Bauer:

- *YS* of Sūrah 36 could represent an abbreviation of *YaS'aā* (يسعى – he who runs), from verse 20.

- *Ṣ* of Sūrah 38 might be an abbreviation for *as-Ṣāfināt* of verse 31 (الصّافنات – the well-trained horses).

- *Q* of Sūrah 50 possibly refers to *Qarīnuhu* (قرينه – his companion) from verses 23 and 27.

- *ṬH* of Sūrah 20, he suggests, refers to two separate entities: the *Ṭ* is for *Ṭūwā* (طوى) of verse 12, the holy valley in which God appeared to Moses; and *H* is for *Hārūn* (هارون – Aaron, brother of Moses), who is mentioned in verses 30, 70, 90 and 92.

- *N* of Sūrah 68 is for *majNūn* (مجنون – demented) in verses 2 and 51.

Despite these postulates being nothing more than conjecture, the catchwords are well chosen, and play a significant role in the narrative of each chapter concerned. The problem lies with the other Muqaṭṭa'āt, which in some cases as we have seen span multiple chapters. As yet, no suitable catchwords have been elaborated to fit each occurrence within multiple chapters.

Another thesis is that of Goosens[87] which purports to be less arbitrary than others. He draws on the evidence of there being alternative titles for some chapters in different parts of the world: for instance, Sūrat at-Tawbah is also known as Sūrat al-Bara'a; Sūrat al-I'srā' as Sūrat Bānī I'srā'īl; and Sūrat al-I'khlāṣ as Sūrat at-Tawḥīd. He suggests that the Muqaṭṭa'āt are contractions of now defunct chapter titles, given their invariable presence at the start of 29 chapters.

Goosens[88] further theorises that the names, which the Muqaṭṭa'āt represent, are to be found within the chapters themselves, as this is the basis for the titles of the majority of chapters:

Muqaṭṭa'āt	**Posited Meaning**
N (Sūrah 68)	al-Nūn
Q (50)	Qur'ān
YS (36)	al-Yāsa/al-Yāsīn
Ṣ (38)	aṣ-Ṣāffāt
ALR (10,11,12,14,15)	AL-Rusul
ALMR (13)	AL-MuRsal
ALM (2,3,29,30,31,32)	AL-Mathal
ALMS (7)	AL-MuṢawwir
KHY'Ṣ (19)	al-KaHf/Yaḥyā/Īsā/aḍ-Ḍalāl
ṬH (20)	Ṭūwā/Hārūn
ṬSM (26)	Ṭawd/ash-SHu'arā'/Mūsā
ṬS (27)	aṭ-Ṭayr/Sulaymān
ṬSM (28)	aẓ-Ẓill or aṭ-Ṭūr or aṭ-Ṭīn/ash-SHāṭī'/Mūsā or Madyan
HM (40,41,43,44,45)	al-HaMīm

ḤM (40, 41, 43, 44, 45)	al-Ḫa[illegible]
ḤM/’SQ (42)	al-Ḫa M̱īm/as-S̱ā’at Q̱arīb

Although the majority of lexis suggested by the author to represent the Muqaṭṭa’āt has been extracted from the texts of their respective chapters in line with his ‘title thesis’, all too many of the proposed titles have been concocted by means of suggesting the reconstitution of concurrent chapters (viz. *YS – al-Yāsīn* from Sūrah 37)[89]; positing words beginning with different letters but with the same grapheme in pre-diacritics codices (viz. *KHY’Ṣ* – with the Ṣ coming from *aḍ-Ḍalāl*)[90]; and by analogy (viz. *N – Nūn*/‘large fish’ from ḥūt/‘whale’ as Nūn is not mentioned within the text of Sūrah 68)[91]. Once again, we are led to the conclusion that these proposals are rather too arbitrary and obscure to explain the denotation of the Muqaṭṭa’āt.

Bellamy[92] proposed a theory in line with some classical commentators[93], that the majority of mysterious letters are abbreviations for *ar-raḥmān* and/or *ar-raḥīm*, which compose the *Basmallah* and are amongst the 99 names of God[94].

He suggested that the letters such as *ALR*, *ALM*, and *ḤM* that make up the majority of the Muqaṭṭa’āt, are patent abbreviations of God’s attributes from the *Basmallah*. Whilst the Muqaṭṭa’āt, which prefix the remainder of the chapters, also represent these two divine names but require emendation.[95]

The basis for his theory is that the abbreviations were introduced in the Meccan period by the Prophet’s scribes who, failing to recognise them as abbreviations, inserted the *Basmallah* in addition to the Muqaṭṭa’āt.

Welch[96] criticises Bellamy’s theory as not being consistent with the chronology of the Qur’ānic revelation (the letters almost certainly originate from the Medinan period according to current textual research) and further argues that Bellamy does not explain the relationship of the Muqaṭṭa’āt to their context before these particular chapters. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that so many different abbreviations would have been used as it violates the fundamental principle behind an abbreviation.

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[81] al-Suyūtī, op. cit., pp.8-13.

[82] al-Sayyid al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī. 1980. *Tafsīr 42:1. Tafsīr al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=56&tSoraNo=42&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0. (3 March 2008).

[83] Abū al-Fidā’ Ibn Kathir. 1999. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm (Vol. I)*. Damascus: Dār Ṭayyibah lilnashr wa Tawzī’a. pp.156-157.

[84] Massey, ‘Mysterious Letters’ op. cit., p.473.

[85] Arthur Jeffrey. 1924. ‘The Mystic Letters of the Koran’. *Muslim World* **14**. pp.249.

[86] Ibid., pp.251-252.

[87] Ibid., p.256.

[88] Ibid., pp.256-260.

[89] Ibid., pp.257-258.

[90] Idem.

[91] Idem.

[92] James A Bellamy. 1973. ‘The Mysterious Letters of the Koran: Old Abbreviations of the Basmalah’. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* **93**/3. pp.267-285.

[93] al-Suyūtī, op. cit., p.9.

[94] For a critical examination of the ’99 names’ literature, see: Jamaal al-Din Zarabozo. 1994. ‘The Hadith Naming the Ninety-Nine Names of Allah’. *al-Basheer*, **8**/2. **c.f.** Muḥammad bin ‘Abdallāh al-Tabrīzī. 1980. *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ (Vol. II)*. Beirut: al-Maktab al-I’slāmī. p.15. Muḥammad bin I’smā’īl al-Bukhārī. 1990. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (Vol. III) Ḥadīth No. 2277*. Riyādh: Dār al-Ṭūq al-Najāh. p.197.

[95] See Bellamy’s follow-up article for a list of proposed emendations: James A. Bellamy. 1993. ‘Some Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran’. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* **113**/2. pp.562-573.

[96] Welch, op. cit., p.413.

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Theory Nine – the Letters are a Means of Ordering, Redacting and Editing the Quranic Corpus

Thursday, January 17 2008 by saba7saba7

The other group of theories referred to by Massey[97] can be categorised as dealing in their entirety with the actual redaction of the Qur'ānic corpus. They hold that the Muqaṭṭa'āt are an integral part of the original codex, but peripheral to the revelation itself.

We have already examined Bauer's catchword theory, but he also maintained, as have many other scholars, that the Muqaṭṭa'āt were critical to the chapter order and that they therefore influenced the final structure of the corpus[98].

Loth and Scwalley's[99] earlier contribution to Bauer's theory maintained the central proposition of the Muqaṭṭa'āt being integral to the text, convinced by the arrangement of the chapters prefixed by the same letters containing similar information. Unfortunately, no explanation as to the Muqaṭṭa'āt prefixing single chapters was made as these single letters proved impossible to rationalise.

Bell, in his 'Introduction to the Koran'[100], saw both the letters and the *Basmallah* as integral to the original corpus, maintaining that the Muqaṭṭa'āt were early Medinan revisions adapting chapters for inclusion in the final corpus.

The most contemporary redactional theory confirms that the chapters are not arranged from the longest to the shortest even with the exclusion of chapters 1, 113 and 114, and hence 'exceptions' were made for the decreasing-length ordering of chapters beginning with the Muqaṭṭa'āt[101].

Neal Robinson[102] has expressed reservations with this theory. He demonstrates that there are exceptions to this decreasing-length order even if the chapters commencing with the Muqaṭṭa'āt are taken into account. He also points out that not all the chapters beginning with the same letters are arranged together.

Instead, he suggests that other factors including the repetition of key words and phrases in consecutive chapters were taken into account by the corpus redactors. Indeed, this appears to be the crux of the argument: if some concrete link could be established between chapters prefixed by the same Muqaṭṭa'āt, it would only leave us with the explanation of the letters heading only one sūrah to investigate. Nevertheless, the redactional theory of the origin of the Muqaṭṭa'āt still does not explain their placement above these particular 29 chapters and not others.

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[97] Massey, 'Mysterious Letters' op. cit., p.473.

[98] Welch, op. cit., p.413.

[99] Ibid., pp.413-414.

[100] Richard Bell. 1970. *Bell's Introduction to the Quran – Revised by W. Montgomery Watt*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. pp.63-64.

[101] Massey, 'Mysterious Letters' op. cit., p.474.

[102] Neal Robinson. 2004. *Discovering the Qur'an: a contemporary approach to a veiled text*. Washington: Georgetown University Press. pp.260-270.

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Theory Ten – the Letters are Names of Redactors or Readers of Various Chapters

Wednesday, January 16 2008 by saba7saba7

Before expanding on this well elaborated theory, it should be noted that in spite of the research and proposals by numerous contemporary Western scholars which presume the Muqaṭṭa'āt to be redactional ciphers, not present in the original revelation, an oft-quoted *ḥadīth* collected by at-Tirmidhī[103] would seem to contradict this assertion:

> "Abdallāh bin Masa'ūd narrated that the Prophet said: 'He who reads one letter of the Quran it (becomes) for him a good deed, and a single good deed is rewarded (by Allah) by ten times the like thereof. I am not saying that Alif-Lām-Mīm is one word, but that Alif is a (separate) letter, Lām is a (separate) letter, and Mīm is a (separate) letter.'"

Noldeke[104] was the first to propose the Muqaṭṭa'āt as abbreviations of redactors who Zayd bin Thabit had consulted regarding the variant readings of the revelation. He later changed his mind[105], concluding that the letters were mystical symbols observed by the Prophet in the late Meccan and early Medinan periods.

Hartwig Hirschfeld[106] expanded on Noldeke's theory and proposed a list of amanuenses for the letters:

M=Mughīra
Ṣ=Ḥafṣah
R=az-Zubayr
K=A'bū Bakr
H=A'bū Hurayrah
N='Uthmān
Ṭ=Ṭalha
S=S'ad bin A'bī Waqqaṣ
H=Hudhayfah
'='Umar/'Alī/Ibn 'Abbās/'Āi'shah
Q=al-Qasim bin Rabī'a

Alas, such proposals are testament to the resourcefulness of their authors rather than providing concrete solutions to the presence of the Muqaṭṭa'āt. Although such abbreviations for the redactors seem plausible, he does not offer an explanation as to why only 29 chapters have been inscribed and not the other 85.

Massey[107] made a comparison of 11 different multiple instances of the Muqaṭṭa'āt. His research revealed that the order of the letters is neither random nor arbitrary, as one would expect had the letters stood for sentences or words.

Sūrah 42, with *HM/'SQ*, appears to violate the principle of the letter ranking (the *Mīm* appears before the *Sīn*, which does not occur in any of the other co-occurrences of the Muqaṭṭa'āt). Yet, these letters are generally divided into two sets, with *ḤM* appearing in verse 1, and *'SQ* appearing in verse 2. Massey[108] suggests that *ḤM* was added by analogy later as this group of Muqaṭṭa'āt appears in the middle of a group of chapters prefixed by *ḤM*.

The discovery of the ranking system for the letters adds further weight to the theory that the Muqaṭṭa'āt are the names of redactors. Zayd bin Thabit could have used the abbreviations to represent either one source of reader or for a reciter whose recitals were used to support the text over and above other variant readings. The readers were ranked in terms of reliability and importance; hence, the letters never violated the ranking that he gave them. Whether or not the names conceived of to fit the letters are the correct ones, we shall never be certain.

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[103] Muḥammad bin 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī. 1999. *Sunan al-Tirmidhī (Vol. V) Ḥadīth No. 2910*. Beirut: Dār I'ḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī. p.175.

[104] Welch, op. cit., p.412.

[105] Idem.

[106] Idem.

[107] Massey, 'Mystery Letters of the Qur'an' op. cit., pp.497-501

[108] Ibid., p.499.

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Theory Eleven – the Letters are a Doxological or Liturgical Device Used to Introduce the Rhyme Scheme of the Chapters that they Prefix

Tuesday, January 15 2008 by saba7saba7

My own theory is that the letters are a means of focusing the attention of the listener on the rhyme scheme and assonance of the chapters that they precede.

The Muqaṭṭa'āt have three distinct roles: in the first instance, and this is in the majority of cases, they set the rhyme scheme of either the entire sūrah or the first few verses of that sūrah. The 17 chapters with groups of letters ending –īm, -īn or –ūn (i.e. the chapters prefixed by ALM, ḤM, ṬSM, ṬS, YS and N) all introduce the rhyme for their respective chapters. Chapter 20 with ṬH has the –ā rhyme; chapter 38 with Ṣ has verses terminating in the long vowel –ā and a consonant; chapter 13 with ALMR has –īn then –ūn followed by –āb and –ār; chapter 42 with ḤM and 'SQ also begins with –īn then –ūn followed by –īl and –īr. The only exceptions are the ALR prefixed chapters, which do not appear to have a specific rhyme scheme.

In the second instance, the letters themselves are indicative of the wide variation in places of articulation used for the Arabic abjad, and their placement before the chapters concerned serves as a form of preliminary inurement for the correct enunciation of the subsequent words. If we observe the table below, in no co-occurrence of the Muqaṭṭa'āt do we find two similarly articulated letters[109][110]:

Muqaṭṭa'āt	Place of Articulation (Manner of Articulation)
a l m	pharyngeal, dental-alveolar, labial
a l m ṣ	pharyngeal, dental-alveolar, labial, dental-alveolar
a l r	pharyngeal, dental-alveolar (lateral), dental-alveolar (trill)
a l m r	pharyngeal, dental-alveolar (lateral), labial, dental-alveolar (trill)
k h y ' ṣ	velar, laryngeal, VOWEL, pharyngeal, dental-alveolar
ṭ h	dental-alveolar, pharyngeal
ṭ s m	dental-alveolar (velarised), dental-alveolar (unvelarised), labial
ṭ s	dental-alveolar (velarised), dental-alveolar (unvelarised)
y s	VOWEL, dental-alveolar
ṣ	dental-alveolar
ḥ m	pharyngeal, labial
ḥ m ' s q	pharyngeal, labial, laryngeal, dental-alveolar, uvular
q	uvular
n	dental-alveolar

In most cases, the place of articulation for each letter is quite distinct. When there is an overlap (albeit never in consecutive letters within the same co-occurrence), then the manner of articulation is varied. Altogether, the Muqaṭṭa'āt represent the entire range of Arabic articulatory phonetics.

In the third and final instance, they provide an integrated timing mechanism for the elaboration of the first few key verses. The letters themselves are recited separately, and according to the rules of recital or *Tajwīd*, should be lengthened if they contain a long vowel (ا و ي). For example, the letters ط and ه, written طاء and هاء respectively are not lengthened. On the other hand, the letters أ ل م are written ألف, لام and ميم respectively, so that when they are recited only the letters ل and م are lengthened. If any of the Muqaṭṭa'āt are lengthened, they must be prolonged to the power of six times the non-lengthened letters. As we can see from the table below, with different combinations of the letters the results are astonishing:

Name of Sūrah	Time taken to recite Muqaṭṭa'āt	Time taken to recite the first verse

	Muqaṭṭaʿāt	(Mujawwad[111])
al-Baqarah (ألّمّ)	7	7
Marīam (كّهيعّصّ)	14	13
al-Qalam (نّ)	4	4

The concordance of rhyme, assonance and timing, in other words the auditory properties of the Muqaṭṭaʿāt, seem to have a bearing on the chapters which they precede. The relationship with the text in each case would seem to discount the possibility that the letters are merely names of redactors, or is their resonance with the text just a coincidence? Nevertheless, if the Muqaṭṭaʿāt were part of the original corpus and played some role in recital, we are still no closer to ascertaining the reasons behind their placement at the head of these particular chapters and not others.

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[109] Dr. Daniel Newman. *'The Phonetics of Arabic'*. Durham University. http//:www.dur.ac.uk/daniel.newman/phon5.pdf (10 March 2008).

[110] ʿAmr bin ʿUthmān bin Qanbar Sībawīh. 1999. *al-Kitāb*. Beirut: Dar al-ʿIlmīyah. pp.572-575.

[111] Reciter: Qārī' Shaykh ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ ʿAbd al-Ṣamad.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

Monday, January 14 2008 by saba7saba7

What is clear from the plethora of research presented is that opinions on the subject of the Muqaṭṭaʿāt, both contemporary and traditional, are divergent and in some cases conflicting.

Traditional Muslim scholarship, partly due to the reverence with which the Qur'ānic corpus is held, has steered clear of investigating the phenomenon too profoundly for fear of the accusation of heresy or textual blasphemy. We need only note the circumstances surrounding Dr Rashad Khalifa's demise[112] to gain an understanding of the risks involved in questioning the textual apparatus of the Holy Book of Islām. That said, several plausible explanations for the presence of the Muqaṭṭaʿāt have been offered by the traditional scholars, notably Ibn Kathīr, as-Suyūtī and, more recently, aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Most traditional scholarship has envisaged the letters as integral to the original revelation, and explanations have centred around their relevance in communicating the text's miraculous qualities or its divine origins.

In terms of contemporary erudition, academics have tended to fall under two classifications: those who see the Muqaṭṭaʿāt as part of the original revelation, and those who believe that the letters were part of the redaction process and/or became integral to the existing text erroneously. Nevertheless, the rational approach to this textual phenomenon has unearthed some interesting and very plausible explanations for the occurrence of the letters.

The implications for inter-religious dialogue of the Muqaṭṭaʿāt are twofold: firstly, it behoves the Christian interlocutor to acknowledge that Muslims consider the letters to be God's speech, preserved for eternity in the Divine Tablet (al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ): a form of theophany. Moreover, as the majority of Muslims today endorse the creedal doctrine of the uncreatedness and inimitability of the Qur'ān, any serious textual discussion would have to recognise that any criticism of the text amounts to a direct attack on the authenticity of the religion as a whole.

Secondly, unlike Christianity but paralleling Judaism, Islām holds a special place within tradition for the inlibration of the revelation and the ritual recital of the text[113]. The Muqaṭṭaʿāt form part of the daily ritual of any Muslim and any discussion of their origin and import should appreciate their importance in Muslim orthopraxy.

This expository paper has included a comprehensive review of current research on the textual apparatus known as the Muqaṭṭaʿāt. Recommended areas for further investigation would be recent investigations into the potential links between the letters and Egyptian hieroglyphs. Several books have been authored on this topic recently, but it is beyond the author to comprehend and review texts of such complexity in the Arabic language at this time. Another feasible area of research might be a comprehensive review and comparison of apocryphal codices to ascertain any non-concordance with the ʿUthmānic codex in terms of the letters.

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[112] See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashad_Khalifa#Assassination, http://www.rashadkhalifa.org/khalifa.html, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2001/10/26/attack/main316077.shtml (10 March 2008)

http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2001/10/26/attack/main316077.shtml (10 March 2008).

[113] Ghulam Sarwar. 1999. *Islām: Beliefs and Teachings*. London: The Muslim Educational Trust. pp.29-36, 50, 78.

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Appendix One: List of the Muqatta'āt in the Holy Qur'ān

Sunday, January 13 2008 by saba7saba7

Disconnected Letters	Chapter
a l m (الم)	2 al-Baqarah (The Cow)
a l m (الم)	3 āl 'Imrān (The Family of Imran)
a l m ṣ (المص)	7 al-A'arāf (The Elevated Places)
a l r (الر)	10 Yūnus (Jonah)
a l r (الر)	11 Hūd (Hud)
a l r (الر)	12 Yūsuf (Joseph)
a l m r (المر)	13 ar-Raʾd (The Lightning)
a l r (الر)	14 I'brāhīm (Abraham)
a l r (الر)	15 al-Ḥijr (The Stony Tract)
k h y ʾṣ (كهيعص)	19 Maryam (Mary)
ṭ h (طه)	20 Ṭa-ha
ṭ s m (طسم)	26 ash-Shu'arā' (The Poets)
ṭ s (طس)	27 an-Naml (The Ants)
ṭ s m (طسم)	28 al-Qaṣaṣ (The Narration)
a l m (الم)	29 al-ʾAnkabūt (The Spider)
a l m (الم)	30 ar-Rūm (The Romans)
a l m (الم)	31 Luqmān (Luqman)
a l m (الم)	32 as-Sajdah (The Prostration)
y s (يس)	36 Yā-sīn
ṣ (ص)	38 Ṣād
ḥ m (حم)	40 Ghāfir (The Forgiver)
ḥ m (حم)	41 Fuṣṣilat (The Detailed Explanation)
ḥ m / ʾs q (حم/عسق)	42 ash-Shūrā (The Consultation)
ḥ m (حم)	43 az-Zukhruf (The Gold Adornments)
ḥ m (حم)	44 ad-Dukhān (The Smoke)
ḥ m (حم)	45 al-Jāthīyah (The Kneeling)
ḥ m (حم)	46 al-Aḥqāf (The Dunes)
q (ق)	50 Qāf
n (ن)	68 al-Qalam (The Pen)

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Appendix Two: List of the Muqatta'āt in the Context of the Verses which they Precede

Saturday, January 12 2008 by saba7saba7

Chapter	Opening Verse(s)
	1.

2	***Alif-Lām-Mīm*.** **2.** This is the Book, whereof there is no doubt; guidance for those who are pious and righteous persons.
3	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Mīm*.** **2.** Allāh! None has the right to be worshipped but He, the Ever Living, the One Who sustains and protects all that exists. **3.** It is He Who has sent down the Book to you (Muḥammad) with truth, confirming what came before it. And he sent down the Torah and the Gospel.
7	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Mīm-Ṣād*.** **2.** (This is the) Book sent down unto you (O Muḥammad), so let not your breast be narrow there from, that you warn thereby, and be it a reminder unto the believers.
10	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Rā*.** These are the Verses of the Book *Al-Hakīm* (showing lawful and unlawful things, explaining Allāh's Laws for mankind).
11	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Rā*.** (This is) a Book, the Verses whereof are perfected and then explained in detail from One Who is All-Wise and Well-Acquainted (with all things).
12	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Rā*.** These are the Verses of the Clear Book. **2.** Verily, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān in order that you may understand.
13	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Mīm-Rā*.** These are the Verses of the Book, and that which has been revealed unto you (Muḥammad) from your Lord is the truth, but most men believe not.
14	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Rā*.** (This is) a Book which We have revealed unto you (O Muḥammad) in order that you might lead mankind out of darkness into light by their Lord's Leave to the Path of the All-Mighty, the Owner of all Praise.
15	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Rā*.** These are the Verses of the Book, and a plain Qur'ān.
19	**1.** ***Kāf-Hā'-Yā'-'Aīn-Ṣād*.** **2.** (This is) a mention of the mercy of your Lord to His slave Zakarīya (Zachariah).
20	**1.** ***Ṭā-Hā'*.** **2.** We have not sent down the Qur'ān unto you (O Muḥammad) to cause you distress, **3.** But only as a Reminder to those who fear (Allāh). **4.** A revelation from Him (Allāh) Who has created the earth and high heavens. **5.** The Most Beneficent (Allāh) rose over the Throne (in a manner that suits His Majesty). **6.** To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is

	on the earth, and all that is between them, and all that is under the soil. **7.** And if you (O Muḥammad) speak (the invocation) aloud, then verily, He knows the secret and that which is yet more hidden.
26	**1.** ***Ṭā-Sīn-Mīm***. **2.** These are the verses of the manifest Book.
27	**1.** ***Ṭā-Sīn***. These are the verses of the Qur'ān, and (it is) a Book (that makes things) clear; **2.** A guide (to the Right Path); and glad tidings for the believers.
28	**1.** ***Ṭā-Sīn-Mīm***. **2.** These are verses of the manifest Book.
29	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Mīm.*** **2.** Do people think that they will be left alone because they say "We believe" and will not be tested.
30	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Mīm.*** **2.** The Romans have been defeated.
31	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Mīm.*** **2.** These are verses of the Wise Book.
32	**1.** ***Alif-Lām-Mīm.*** **2.** The revelation of the Book is from the Lord of the *'Alamīn* (mankind, jinn and all that exists) in which there is no doubt!
36	**1.** ***Yā'-Sīn.*** **2.** By the Qur'ān, full of wisdom, **3.** Truly, you (O Muḥammad) are one of the Messengers, **4.** On a Straight Path. **5.** (This is) a revelation sent down by the All-Mighty, the Most Merciful.
38	**1.** ***Ṣād***. By the Qur'ān full of reminders.
40	**1.** ***Hā-Mīm***. **2.** The revelation of the Book is from Allāh the All-Mighty, the All-Knower.
41	**1.** ***Hā-Mīm.*** **2.** A revelation from Allāh, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. **3.** A Book whereof the verses are explained in detail; A Qur'ān in Arabic for people who know.

42	**1.** ***Hā-Mīm***. **2.** ***'Aīn-Sīn-Qāf***. **3.** Likewise Allāh, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise inspires you (O Muḥammad) as (He inspired) those before you.
43	**1.** ***Hā-Mīm***. **2.** By the manifest Book. **3.** We verily have made it a Qur'ān in Arabic that you may be able to understand (its meanings and its admonitions). **4.** And verily it is in the Mother of the Book (i.e. *Al-Lawḥ Al-Maḥfūẓ*), before Us, indeed exalted, full of wisdom.
44	**1.** ***Hā-Mīm***. **2.** By the manifest Book that makes things clear.
45	**1.** ***Hā-Mīm***. **2.** The revelation of the Book is from Allāh, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.
46	**1.** ***Hā-Mīm***. **2.** The revelation of the Book is from Allāh, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.
50	**1.** ***Qāf***. By the Glorious Qur'ān. **2.** Nay, they wonder that there has come to them a petitioner (Muḥammad) from among themselves. So the disbelievers say: "This is a strange thing! **3.** "When we are dead and have become dust (shall we be resurrected?) That is a distant outcome." **4.** We know that which the earth takes of them (their dead bodies), and with Us is a Book preserved (i.e. the Book of Decrees).
68	**1.** ***Nūn***. By the pen and what the (angels) write (in the records of men).

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Appendix Three: Co-occurrence of the Muqatta'āt across Chapters

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a	ḥ	r	s	ṣ	ṭ		q	k	l	m	n	h	y
a l m									a l m	a l m			
a l m ṣ				a l m ṣ					a l m ṣ	a l m ṣ			
a l r		a l r							a l r				
a l m		a l m							a l m	a l m			

r		r							r	r			
				k h y ʾ ṣ		k h y ʾ ṣ		k h y ʾ ṣ				k h y ʾ ṣ	k h y ʾ ṣ
					ṭ h							ṭ h	
			ṭ s m		ṭ s m					ṭ s m			
			ṭ s		ṭ s								
					ṭ h							ṭ h	
			y s										y s
				ṣ									
	ḥ m									ḥ m			
			ʾ s q			ʾ s q	ʾ s q						
							q						
											n		

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